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Pamph.

# WHY I WAS IMMERSED.

BY A PRESBYTERIAN.

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## AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

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There are those who may take exception to this little pamphlet being issued over the *nom de plume* it bears; they may claim that the views it advocates forfeit the right of the author to the name Presbyterian. I trust such is not the case. I have maintained the name on the pamphlet because I love my Church, and believe that there is within her fold room for those who may differ with her on this question of Baptism, since the difference rises from a desire to be loyal to the teaching of the Bible, even at the expense of disagreement with her standards. My Church has always stood for the authority of God's Word; its commendation rather than condemnation must therefore rest upon those who bow to what they conscientiously believe to be its teaching. What follows this is written in no controversial or combative spirit; but with that diffidence and humility becoming one who is young in Christian experience and without the learning resulting from a course in a theological seminary. My Bible, and I humbly believe, God's Holy Spirit, have been my only teachers in the study of this question. If what I have written does not commend itself to my readers as being in harmony with the Word, let them forget it. My purpose and

hope have been that perhaps some who may be, as I was, seeking God's will about Baptism, will find help towards a solution of their difficulty, in the same way as I did. Let me, in conclusion, say one word to my readers. Hear both sides of the question. Go to your pastor and get his views ; but test all by the Word. Let what God says, in the light of your own prayerful, sanctified Spirit-guided common sense, settle the matter finally, "That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."—1 Cor. 2:5.

S. JOHN DUNCAN-CLARK.

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# WHY I WAS IMMERSED.

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The question of baptism always interested me, even from the days of my boyhood, when I began first to enquire for myself concerning the reasonableness of the faith in which I had been brought up. For some years the question remained an open one in my mind, until at last I decided to settle it one way or another for all time. Born a Presbyterian, and growing up under Presbyterian instruction, every influence from without tended to confirm my assent to the doctrine of infant baptism. Such influences, however, found opposition from something within that always refused finally to acknowledge the scripturalness of the dogma. Eventually the long-impending conflict was precipitated, and for the sake of those who may not yet have settled this question, I want as briefly and clearly as possible to set forth the arguments that convinced me of the truth that the baptism of believers, and that by immersion, was alone valid.

To my mind, the first question to be answered was, who, according to the Scriptures, are eligible for baptism? Turning to the Shorter Catechism, than which a more concise and simple statement of Christian truth cannot be found, I read, "the infants of such as are members of the visible church are to be baptized," and in proof of this statement three Scripture passages are

quoted, viz.: Gen. 17:10; Acts 2:38; 1 Cor. 7:14. Now it is but fair to presume that the compilers of the Catechism chose the very strongest passages in God's Word to give as authority for their claim, and that if a candid, prayerful examination of these passages finds them insufficient for this purpose, the doctrine of infant baptism will at least be negatively disproved, since it will be left without scriptural foundation. The first of these passages I will deal with later in the argument. The other two we will look at now. Acts 2:37, 38 reads, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is to you, and to your children, and to them that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." The contention from this passage is, that the use of the word "children" conveys to unconscious infants the privilege of baptism. Disregarding for a moment the simple explanation that "children" is used frequently in the Bible to mean "descendants," and granting that in this case it means or includes new-born babes, let us see what such an admission involves. First, it compels one to take the position that infants, having repented and being baptized, become partakers of a promise assuring remission of sins and the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. Even suppose that babes are capable of possessing the blessings thus conferred, I fail to see how the little ones can in any sense be said to repent. And yet if the fulfillment of one condition—baptism—is claimed for them, the same reasoning will

certainly involve that of the other—repentance. But if this were not enough to show the untenable position occupied by those who thus interpret the word "children," surely the last clause of v. 38 relieves the question of all doubt. The three classes, "you," "your children," "them that are afar off," are all limited by these concluding words, "even as many as the Lord our God shall call." Now, so far as human observation is concerned, there is only one evidence of election or calling on the part of an individual, and that is his personal response to, and acceptance of, the call. When such evidence is given, then baptism may be administered, and the promise received. This surely is the simple teaching of the passage. What then is meant by children? Primarily just what is said. Children who by repentance and faith give evidence that they have accepted God's invitation may be baptized, and receive the promise. Secondarily, the word may refer to descendants, indicating thus that the promise was not intended only for apostolic times.

The other passage needs but brief notice. I Cor. 7:14, reads: "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified in the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified in the husband; else were your children unclean; but now are they holy" (same word in Greek as sanctified). From this it is claimed that because the children (unconscious babes or intelligent boys and girls, the claim is as fair for one as the other) are called "holy," they have a right to baptism. The same reasoning would confer baptism as a privilege upon the unbelieving husband or the unbelieving

wife, since each is also called "holy." But no one would have the hardihood to claim that the verse authorised this. How, then, can it be used to support infant baptism?

Now let us take the passage in Gen. 17: 10 recording the establishment of circumcision as a rite among the Jews. It is claimed that baptism in the Christian Church takes the place of circumcision in the Jewish nation, and that it is contrary to New Testament teaching to make the application of baptism under grace narrower than that of circumcision under law. Thus far we may agree with the contention; issue must be taken, however, when the claim is made that this parallel between circumcision and baptism involves the baptism of infants. On the contrary a little honest thinking will suffice to convince the unprejudiced mind that the parallel rather involves the baptism of believers.

The Jews are God's earthly people, their inheritance is terrestrial, all their promised blessings and future glory are bound up in the possession of Palestine. Consequently an infant born of Jewish parentage becomes by natural birth entitled to the national privileges of this peculiar people. Natural birth, therefore, gains for him the sign and seal of such title, the rite of circumcision. He is a Jew because his parents are Jews, and he is circumcised because he is a Jew.

The Church is God's heavenly people, our inheritance is celestial, all our promised blessings and future glory are bound up in the possession of a spiritual kingdom. But natural birth entitles no one (John 3:6.

7) to the privileges of this spiritual kingdom; why then should it gain for one the sign and seal of such title, the rite of baptism? One is not a member of the heavenly people until one is born again; but then, when through the Spirit's work of regeneration one has become a "babe in Christ" (1 Cor. 3:1), the true "infant baptism" becomes legitimate and valid. Thus the parallel is complete, and we find that the argument from circumcision becomes indeed a strong bulwark for the truth of believers' baptism. Nor can it be claimed that this interpretation narrows the application of baptism under grace in comparison with the application of circumcision under law. Citizenship in the Jewish nationality was a matter of sex. Citizenship in the heavenly people knows neither male nor female. Circumcision was as straitened as the law; baptism is as wide as grace. Who dare make it wider?

This is the negative side of the question. I hardly think these unsupported passages can be fairly held as sufficient authority for the statement that "the infants of such as are members of the visible church are to be baptized."

We must now turn our attention to the positive side of the question, and see for ourselves what is the reasonable deduction from all other existing evidence. Let us begin by going back to the institution of Christian baptism by our Lord. In Matt. 28:19 we read: "Go ye, therefore, and disciple all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Again in Mark 16:16,

"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." These are the only recorded utterances of our Master upon the question. Can infant baptism be directly or indirectly inferred from them? Or on the other hand is not the baptism of believers the only baptism to which they give the least authority? There is no room for debate or argument in these words of Christ. What they mean they say, and we can safely leave them to speak for themselves without further comment.

Our next field for investigation must be in the practice and teaching of the apostles. How did they in the light and teaching of the Holy Ghost understand and interpret these words of our Lord? The answer should practically settle the matter.

Examination of the apostles' practice recorded in the Acts and Epistles fails to discover a single instance of infant baptism. Exception will be taken to an argument based on this, on the ground that in the early Church days, when there were few believing parents, baptism in the majority of cases could only have been administered to adults on profession of faith. Admitting this to be a proper objection, I ask for only one case of infant baptism to prove that believers' baptism, as recorded in Acts, was not the invariable practice of New Testament days. Within three years of Pentecost there can have been little short of 10,000 believers. Had none of these 10,000 any babes? If they had, were any of the infants baptized? Not a single instance is recorded. I think it is at least fair to claim that apostolic practice, so far as recorded,

does not support the theory of infant baptism, while it certainly does confirm the truth of believers' baptism. No doubt the much-used argument based upon the baptism of households will occur to my readers. I must ask a little patience. It will be dealt with presently.

The teaching of the apostles must next claim our attention. The three following passages are from the writings of Paul:

Rom. 6:3-5: "Or are ye ignorant that *all* who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him through baptism unto death; that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him by the likeness of His death, we shall be also by the likeness of His resurrection."

Gal. 3:27: "For *as many* of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ."

Col. 2:12: "Having been buried with Him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you being dead through your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, you, I say, did He quicken together with Him."

It needs little study to see that in all these, Paul speaks of baptism as a rite involving not only intelligence, but also spiritual insight on the part of the subject. He also shows that the sequence to baptism is such as only a believer in Christ could realize. In the three churches to which the letters containing these passages were addressed, there must have been baptized infants, if in-

fant baptism were an apostolic practice. Can the "all" of Romans, and the "as many" of Galatians be held to include such infants in the "newness of life," and "putting on of Christ" taught in these verses as consequent upon baptism? Yet they must if there were any baptized babes. But the verse from Colossians is conclusive. "Through faith in the working of God," certainly implies faith on the part of the one baptized, or else language has no meaning. Such faith of course is not possible in the case of an infant. So much for Paul's teaching. What conclusion is an unprejudiced mind forced to by these passages? Surely that a candidate to be eligible for baptism must at least be old enough to grasp the meaning of the rite, and exercise a personal faith in the working of God.

One other passage we must notice as we pass from the subject of apostolic teaching. We have already seen how clear is the language of Peter on the day of Pentecost, and how absolutely it excludes the idea of infant baptism; now let us just glance at that apostle's only other recorded deliverance on this subject. In 1 Peter 3:21 we read, "Eight souls were saved through water, which also after a true likeness doth now save you, even baptism, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the interrogation of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Here the ceremony of baptism is linked with the idea of the saving power of Christ's death and resurrection, a thought which cannot be intelligible to a babe. We will come back to this passage presently when we con-

sider the symbolism of the rite, and its proper mode of administration. So far I think we have seen that the strong tendency of Scripture teaching favours the truth of believers' baptism. We have tried to meet fairly every argument on the other side, and have honestly faced what is claimed to be their most conclusive evidence. It is for the reader to say whether we have proven our case. One argument alone remains to be met, and that is the one based upon certain cases of household baptism.

Let us imagine a somewhat parallel case. For example, a household in which there is an infant of days, is said to have united on a certain occasion in prayer. Are we forced to conclude from such a statement either that the baby joined them in the exercise, or that the story is not true? Do we not, using our common sense, and judging from our experience of what infants can do, receive from the statement the impression it was meant to convey, viz.: That all in the household capable of praying joined in prayer? Shall we not use a like amount of common sense in drawing our inferences from the cases of household baptism mentioned in the New Testament? And if we are to judge fairly and sensibly of who are included in the word "household," we must not overlook any information that will give us any light on the question. There are three lines of thought that will lead us to a right decision. 1. Apostolic practice in the case of individuals, which we have already seen was invariably the baptism of believers. 2. Apostolic teaching as to the meaning of baptism which we have also seen is unanim-

ous in its requirement of intelligence, spiritual perception, and faith on the part of the subject. 3. Any case of household baptism in which the details are given us. There is but one such case, that of the Philippian jailer, and the Bible leaves no shadow of a doubt that his whole household believed before they were baptized. Read it for yourself in Acts 16:33, 34, "And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, immediately. And he brought them up into his house, and set meat before them, and rejoiced greatly, with *all his house, having believed in God.*" (R.V.)

All these considerations, carefully and prayerfully weighed, convinced me that the New Testament and the apostles had no idea of infant baptism. That the simple and unmistakable teaching of the Holy Spirit was that anyone repenting of sin and believing on Christ might and ought to be baptized, but only these.

The second question for consideration, having settled who were eligible for baptism, was what is the scriptural method of administering the ordinance? In settling this question there are several points that claim our study. 1. What do the word baptize and its derivatives mean? 2. What was the custom followed in early Church times? 3. What is the symbolic meaning of the rite?

The first of these points is one around which has been waged a fierce battle in the theological world. We can begin by granting to the other side that the Greek word, which in our New Testament is simply anglicized without the faintest attempt at trans-

lating it, is used sometimes in the classics, perhaps once or twice in the New Testament, where a word meaning poured or washed might have been used instead. When we have admitted this we have practically allowed all that any can claim, and yet not weakened our own case in the least degree. An examination of any authoritative Greek lexicon, such as Grimm's, Liddell & Scott's, etc., will give us as the primary meaning of "*baptizo*," *to immerse*. All authorities agree on this point. In cases where the word may be used in any other sense, it is simply because the idea it represents is intimately associated with that of immersion, such as the practical consequences of "pouring" or "washing." But when the word is used alone, without qualifying circumstances that would render its primary meaning impossible or improbable, it is only fair that it should be translated "immerse." Let us suppose that the proper mode of baptism was by "sprinkling" or "pouring"; is it not a proper question to ask why, if such is the case, did not our Lord and His apostles in speaking of the rite use either of the Greek words that unmistakably signify these things? Yet in not one case is the ordinance described by any other word than "*baptizo*." It is not the method of the Holy Spirit to use language without special significance. Every scriptural word is employed because of its absolute fitness for the idea it is intended to express. Why, then, did the Holy Spirit use the word "*baptizo*" if He really meant "*rantizo*" or "*cheo*"? The discussion of this point need scarcely be carried farther. The open mind will readily see that

to get the idea of sprinkling out of baptism, the word has to be forced, and the spirit of scriptural interpretation violated.

The second point concerns the custom in early Church times. For the custom of New Testament days I simply ask you to read such passages as Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; Acts 8:38, 39, where the details of the ordinance are given. Does the language in these cases, so far as it indicates anything, favour the idea of sprinkling or immersion? I leave the question for you to answer, fairly and without prejudice. In the last passage, recording the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch, it has been claimed that, in the country traversed by the eunuch, enough water could not have been found to permit of immersion; but Dr. Thompson, author of "The Land and the Book," a standard work, speaks of a stream in that neighborhood thus: "A fine stream of water, deep enough in some places even in June to satisfy the utmost wishes of our Baptist friends." It is interesting to notice in passing that had sprinkling been considered sufficient for the purpose, the eunuch would have probably had sufficient water in his chariot to perform the ceremony, without stopping his whole cavalcade. It is impossible to suppose that, on a long journey such as he was taking, he would be dependent for two or three drops of water upon a chance stream. That the practice of the early Church was immersion every authority of any importance readily concedes. John Calvin, Luther, Melancthon, Adam Clark, Dean Alford, Dr. Schaff, Dean Stanley, John Wesley, Neander, Pressense,

form a chorus made up of what may be termed the opposition, that, with unparalleled unanimity declare immersion to have been the practice of the early Church. We can safely leave this point in the hands of our opponents; further argument is unnecessary; their frank testimony has settled the question beyond dispute.

The third and last point to be considered is, What does the ordinance symbolize? A little study of such passages as Rom. 6:4; Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:12 will show that its spiritual signification is the union of the believer with his Lord in death, burial and resurrection. Of this union it is intended to be a seal to the believer and a sign to the world. The question then arises, Which ordinance best symbolizes this fact, sprinkling or immersion? There can be little difficulty in arriving at an answer. In immersion the subject goes under the water, and for a moment is as near to death as any one in a normal condition of health can well come. Out of this watery grave he rises gasping for the breath that in but an instant more would have been lost forever. Who can say that this is not a striking picture of the wonderful truth it is intended to represent? Sad, indeed, was the day when, for convenience' sake, the Church gave up this beautiful and solemn imagery, with its deep spiritual significance. What idea does the rite of sprinkling convey? Often in my boyhood have I watched the ceremony, and wondered what its meaning could be. I could only suppose that, in those little drops of water descending on the infant's head, some mysterious grace was conferred upon the uncon-

scious babe ; and my supposition is shared by thousands, who have a superstitious faith in an otherwise meaningless ceremony. It was thus, indeed, that sprinkling and the baptism of infants came to have its origin. Not till 200 years after Christ is there any mention of it, and then it is opposed by Tertullian. Like many other heretical ideas that entered the Church within a century of Pentecost, there came, probably later than this, however, the idea that baptism was essential to salvation. Thus when a man was converted on a dying bed, and was too sick to be immersed, the question arose as to what should be done. To meet the difficulty the plan of pouring or sprinkling was adopted. So you see the practice of pouring or sprinkling had its origin in the dangerous, unscriptural doctrine that baptism was essential to salvation, or, in other words, baptismal regeneration. It was not long until this error led to the baptism of infants, since, if the ceremony was regenerative, logically the earlier the individual was brought under its influence the better. To such an extent was this dreadful teaching carried that in some cases the life of the mother was sacrificed to secure the regeneration of the unborn babe with a few drops of water.

But I have said enough. Such considerations as these overcame all the prejudice of my early training. I was convinced that it was not a question of much or little water, but one of man's way or God's way ; not a question of convenience, but one of obedience. Only they who obey fully will be blessed fully. I wanted all the blessing God had for me, therefore I was immersed.

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